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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000754

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SUBJECT: FURTHER IRANIAN REACTION TO THE QABALA RADAR

REF: BAKU 719

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Classified By: DCM Donald Lu for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: One week after Russia's proposal to make its Qabala radar station available for joint use with the U.S., Iranian reaction to the proposal remains fairly muted. While some members of the Majlis have criticized the announcement, the response of the Iranian executive branch has been more restrained, focusing primarily on the European-based missile defense system the U.S. has proposed. The Iranian media has also largely avoided the topic, with most influential daily newspapers focusing on either economic issues or cyclone Gonu. Embassy contacts, including Azerbaijani Minister of Defense Abiyev, National Security Advisor Aliyev, and a range of independent analysts, suggest that Iran's muted response indicates prior coordination with Russia on this issue. End Summary.

12. (SBU) One week after Russia's proposal to make its Qabala radar station available for joint use with the U.S., Iranian reaction to the proposal remains fairly muted with most criticism emanating from the Iranian Majlis. In a special statement, the Majlis reportedly pronounced "Iran will not permit itself to be turned into an instrument for resolving conflicts between world powers." Individual Members of Parliament (MP) went much further, with MP Ali Ahmadi, a member of the National Security Commission, quoted in Iran Newspaper on June 12 as saying "Iran must not remain quiet in the face of this action, but must confront it decisively." MP Hassan Abbasi is quoted in the same article, saying "the Russian proposal was inconsistent with Iran's national and strategic interests" and that "Iran's Majlis did not have such an expectation of its unkind neighbor."

13. (SBU) Reaction from Iran's executive branch has been more restrained, focusing primarily on the European-based missile defense system the U.S. has proposed. On June 8, Iranian Seher Television (broadcast to Azerbaijan in Azeri) reported that while Tehran's Friday prayer leader Ayatollah Mohammad Emami-Kashani had condemned U.S. plans to station a missile defense system in Europe, noting that Iran did not have missiles capable of reaching Europe. Kashani's condemnation was also reported by the Tehran Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran's External Service in Arabic, with Kashani saying that the U.S. missile shield was actually designed for Russia and China, not Iran. Kashani reportedly made no reference to the Qabala-based radar. Commenting on the Russian proposal on June 11, Iranian Foreign Minister Mottaki told the Iranian Students News Service (ISNA) that Iran did not regard U.S.

joint use of the Qabala radar as a threat to the Islamic Republic. Saying that "Iran has nothing to hide and everything is clear about this country," Mottaki went on to say, "It is obvious that this is a made up clash between the two world powers and therefore we are investigating the issue."

¶4. (SBU) While the major Iranian dailies such as Kayhan or Resalat chose to lead with stories focusing either on economic issues or cyclone Gonu on June 9, a number of papers, both reformist and hardline, criticized the Russian proposal; some characterized it as "anti-Iran." Reformist Mardom Salari and centrist Ebtekar newspapers criticized the proposal, with Ebtekar calling the proposal "controversial." An editorial in reformist Aftab was equally critical, suggesting that Russia had "become bolder than the Americans against Iran." Articles appearing later in the week also questioned Russia's sincerity as an ally, with a June 12 article on Tehran's Mehr News Agency website asking "By allowing the deployment of U.S. forces so near to the Iranian border, would Russia not be breaking its alliance with Iran?" This same article concluded by asking "and doesn't this make it clear that Russia has no qualms about using Iran to neutralize the threats of the United States?"

¶5. (C) Embassy Baku Iranian contacts have had little reaction to the Russian proposal. Their relative lack of reaction is in marked contrast to the Embassy's Azerbaijani contacts, who continue to speculate about the "real" reasons behind Putin's proposal and what they may mean for Azerbaijan's future. Because most of our Iranian contacts are ethnic Azeris who seem to view developments in or involving Iran only through the prism of the ethnic Azeri cause, their indifference to Putin's proposal may be due to the lack of connection to their own separatist agendas.

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¶6. (C) Comment: It is possible that the Iranian government's display of restraint in response to Russia's proposal reflects an eagerness not to anger its ally. Embassy contacts, including Azerbaijani Minister of Defense Abiyev, National Security Advisor Aliyev, and a range of independent analysts, have suggested that Iran's muted response to Russia's proposal indicates prior coordination with Russia on this issue. The timeliness and tone of the Baku Iranian Embassy's press statement in response to the proposal (reftel) seems to support this theory. End Comment.
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